



# The Un-United Kingdom

Waving the Scottish flag on a hill overlooking the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh

After more than 300 years of union, is Scotland ready to declare independence?

BY PATRICIA SMITH

Scotland has been part of the United Kingdom for more than 300 years—and that's long enough if you ask Euan Ingram, a senior at the University of Glasgow.

"We want to strike out on our own on the world stage," says Ingram, a supporter of Scotland's independence movement. "It's a fallacy that we need England to survive—I don't buy that at all."

But 20-year-old Kirsten MacQuarrie, who's also a senior at the school, thinks independence would be a mistake.

"It would be a regressive step for Scotland," she says. "In this era of globalization, the objective should be to maximize connections with other nations, rather than to retreat into smaller groups."

The rest of Scotland is similarly divided about whether it should remain part of the United Kingdom—along with England, Wales, and Northern

Ireland—or become an independent nation for the first time since the early 18th century. Scotland's leader, First Minister Alex Salmond, who favors secession, wants to have a referendum and let Scottish voters decide.

Even though Scotland has only 5 million of the 63 million people in the U.K., its departure would raise a critical question: Would the rest of the United Kingdom hold together if Scotland left?

## Rising Support

There's been talk of Scottish independence for decades, but support for secession appears to be on the rise: Most polls put it at about 30 percent of Scotland's electorate.

Tensions between Scotland and England go back 2,000 years (*see Key Dates, right*). In 122 A.D., the Romans controlled most of present-day England and Wales. But the Emperor Hadrian gave up on subduing the Scottish tribes to the north; instead, he built a 75-mile

wall to keep the “barbarians” out of Roman Britain. (Much of the wall still exists today.)

By the 11th century, Scotland’s tribes had come together to form a kingdom. From the start, England was Scotland’s greatest rival, periodically trying to gain control of its northern neighbor.

After coexisting under the same king for a century, a bankrupt Scotland agreed in 1707 to enter a union with England, in which Scotland gave up independence in return for access to English markets.

Even at the time, the union was denounced as a sellout. “We are bought and sold for English gold,” wrote the great Scottish poet Robert Burns.

Scotland prospered under what eventually became the United Kingdom, but it has always maintained a distinct culture: Men wearing kilts, playing bagpipes, and flying the blue-and-white Scottish flag, rather than the Union Jack, are some examples.

“The English regarded the union as irreversible,” says Neal Ascherson, a Scottish writer. “The Scots, then and now, regarded it as a treaty that could be modified or even ended by mutual agreement.”

In recent decades, many Scots have grown weary of a government based in London. In response to growing Scottish

nationalism, the British government devised a plan for an elected Scottish Parliament, which first met in 1999 and has control of some internal Scottish affairs—like health, education, and transportation—while leaving foreign affairs, defense, and taxation to London.

Then, last May, the Scottish National Party shocked all of Britain by winning a majority in the Scottish Parliament. Suddenly, independence was a hot issue.

### ‘Biggest Decision in 300 Years’

British Prime Minister David Cameron opposes Scottish independence, vowing to keep the U.K. together. But he has agreed to support a referendum, which he believes most Scots will vote against.

“You can be prouder of your Scottish heritage than your British heritage,” Cameron said recently, “and still believe that Scotland is better off in Britain.”

But Salmond, Scotland’s leader, says Scotland would be better off on its own. For one thing, it would have full control of valuable North Sea oil, which is now controlled by London.

“The days of politicians in London telling Scotland what to do and what to think—these days are over,” Salmond says.

The two leaders also differ on the timing of the referendum. Cameron favors an early vote; Salmond, eager for time to build support for secession, is pushing for 2014—the 700th anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn.

Regardless of whether they favor independence, most Scots agree that the referendum is a huge deal.

“This is the biggest decision that Scotland has had to face in 300 years,” says Grant Costello, 19, leader of the Scottish Youth Parliament, “and it will affect the lives of everyone in Scotland.” ●

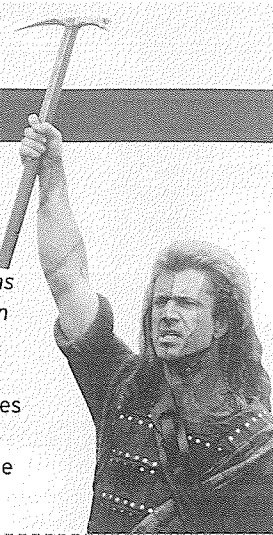
*With reporting by John F. Burns and Alan Cowell of The Times.*

## KEY DATES

1314

### INDEPENDENCE

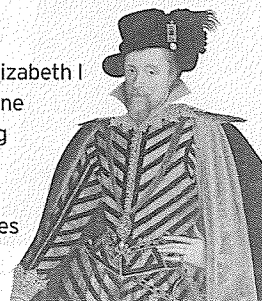
Seventeen years after William Wallace (right, as portrayed by Mel Gibson in *Braveheart*) led an insurgency against the English, Scotland secures its independence when it defeats England at the Battle of Bannockburn.



1603

### A SINGLE MONARCH

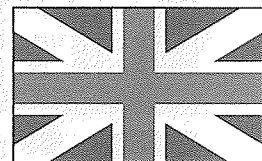
When England’s Queen Elizabeth I dies with no heir, the throne passes to her cousin, King James VI\* of Scotland. He continues to rule Scotland and also becomes England’s King James I.



1707

### ACTS OF UNION

The Acts of Union join England and Scotland, previously separate states with separate legislatures but the same monarch, in a single kingdom called Great Britain. (It became the United Kingdom in 1801, with the addition of Ireland, most of which gained independence in 1922.)



1999

### SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

With Scottish nationalism on the rise, the Scottish Parliament convenes for the first time since 1707, in Edinburgh.



TODAY

### REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE

British Prime Minister David Cameron and Scottish leader Alex Salmond agree to hold a referendum on Scottish independence.

\*James VI was the great-great grandson of King Henry VII of England.



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